

Anhang VI – Malta Public Libraries: Facing the challenges and the way forward

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Public libraries play an important role in our society. Unfortunately, many Maltese people still think that public libraries are simply large stores of books. More effort is therefore required to make people understand the public library's functions and objectives - one can then appreciate better the benefits that can be harvested in order to fully utilise its services.

The public library's main purpose is to foster and strengthen the reading habits of people of all age-groups both for informational and recreational purposes. It offers support and information assistance to individuals, local enterprises and associations. Additionally, it participates in formal and non-formal education and literacy initiatives while promoting both its collections and services.

Public libraries are also community centers where people meet up for a chat, to view or read library resources on site, carry out joint assignment projects, or participate in public activities. Since last year, the Central Public Library has resumed its children and adult activities, which, through other associations were also outreached in a number of area libraries.

These library functions and aims may be successfully met by acknowledging, understanding and keeping abreast with the changing needs of individuals and the community they form part of. This will give rise to a more dynamic public library which will eventually prevail the test of time in this highly competitive and ever changing digital world.

Identifying Users' Needs

Users' needs can be identified through various means such as observation, enhanced Business Intelligence facilities in library systems, and through regular communication with both users and non-users. For instance librarians may carry out formal or informal questionnaires and interviews. Moreover, one may also use other communication and feedback channels including the thorough exploitation of the major social and professional networking sites available on the web to help assess the reading trends locally and abroad.

Questionnaires should inquire feedback on both the collection and library services. Collection inquiries may delve on the current state of the collections, subject areas covered and preferred formats. On the other hand, feedback on library services may refer to the state of current services, new potential services and improvements one might want the public library to offer. Librarians may also ask users about the physical arrangement of the library holdings (cataloguing and classification) and the circulation system (access facilities) and the overall physical orientation and facilities at the public library. Nevertheless, one must not

¹⁴⁶ Falzon, Cheryl (E-Mail, 07.08.2014).